



Children & Family News

October 2003

N.D. Dept. of Human Services' Children & Family Services Division Update

UND School of Social Work to Offer Stipends

The University of North Dakota School of Social Work will be offering stipends this fall to students pursuing either a bachelor's or master's degree in social work. Stipends will range from \$7,790 to \$9,792 and will be available to about 12 students during the program's first year.

To qualify, a student must be pursuing work in the child welfare field and be willing to accept employment in North Dakota at a county social service office, the Division of Juvenile Services, a human service center, or a tribal social services office. Individuals granted a stipend will receive larger amounts of assistance, if they are willing to seek employment in rural areas.

This initiative is intended to address work force concerns. It is becoming increasingly difficult for many agencies to recruit and hire child welfare staff. The university recognizes this need and is working to encourage students to pursue social work degrees focused on child welfare by providing students with financial assistance.

The stipend program is being developed by Ralph Woehle, chairman of the UND Department of Social Work, in collaboration with Paul Ronningen, director of the N.D. Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Division (CFS). For more information, please call Ralph Woehle at 701-777-3765.

Foster Children and SSI Benefits

The Department of Human Services has awarded a contract to F. M. Blake and Associates to review every foster child in North Dakota for possible SSI benefits. These reviews will begin in October 2003.

If a child is eligible, \$552 will be received from the federal government to pay foster care-related expenses while the child is in care. Benefits will follow children home giving parents the needed resources to care for their children and may reduce the likelihood of children returning to foster care.

This initiative may shift some of the cost of providing foster care away from the counties and state to the federal government.

As F.M. Blake conducts this work, they will be contacting social workers regarding case-specific information. F.M. Blake staff will be working on-site in the larger counties, requiring office space, access to a copier, etc. CFS will be working closely with counties to arrange logistics and mutually acceptable schedules.

Pilot Kinship Care Project

The Department of Human Services has been working closely with social service staffs from Burleigh, Morton, and Cass counties to develop a kinship care program to place more children with their extended family members rather than in foster care when a county is given custody of children due to deprivation.

Many family members are not prepared financially to care for additional children. Through adjustments to the TANF program, resources that were made available to foster families will now be available to extended family members.

Pilot Program Features:

- The child must be in the custody of the county.
- A family member within the fifth degree of relationship must be willing to care for the child.
- A family member will need to complete a home study and background check.

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The Child's Care Will Be Supported By:

- A single child only payment of \$213,
- Full Medicaid coverage,
- Full child care coverage,
- Reimbursement for voucher expenses, and/or
- Payment for emergency needs

This project gives extended family members the option of caring for children in county custody. Because the benefits paid to extended family members will not include some of the other foster care related costs, this initiative may reduce costs to the state and county while promoting safe care in a relative's home.

Methamphetamine Impacts Child Welfare

On September 17, 2003, CFS director Paul Ronningen testified before the Budget Committee on Government Services regarding the impact of methamphetamine abuse on child welfare.

The Department surveyed the counties in August 2003 and found the following:

- 117 children or 15 percent of the children in foster care are in care because a parent or guardian is using, manufacturing, or selling methamphetamine.
- Of the 117 children, half would probably not have been removed from their homes if methamphetamine was not a factor.

County Social Service Observations:

- With parents imprisoned, foster care was the only option.
- Meth presents a hazardous environment to children.
- Meth-related situations require intense case management.
- Some employees quit their jobs because of the increased risk of personal harm due to confronting people under the influence of meth.
- Several counties noted increased child abuse and neglect reports.

NOTE: The full report will be posted to the Department of Human Services' Web site: www.state.nd.us/humanservices.

Chairmen Carlisle, asked the department to submit a report to the committee suggesting ways to address the child welfare work force issues associated with intervening with parents who have methamphetamine issues. CFS is seeking input from county social service agencies, treatment providers, and others regarding strategies to support staff when confronting these very difficult situations.

\$2M TANF Reductions Anticipated in Children's Services in 2005-2007

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) appropriation bill, SB 2012, Section 8, requires DHS to make changes during this biennium to programs funded with the TANF block grant so that the cumulative funding anticipated to be spent for the 2005-2007 biennium does not exceed the TANF block grant allocation. North Dakota, like other states, accumulated TANF reserves, which have been expended in lieu of state general fund dollars.

This will affect approximately \$2.3 million in TANF money that has been appropriated to child welfare services. These TANF dollars help fund services such as foster care, child protection, family focused case management, parent aide services, intensive in-home, and county reimbursement for administration.

The department is collaborating with county social services offices to develop several initiatives to reduce the impact to the state and county government. These initiatives include: screening all foster care children for SSI eligibility, piloting a kinship care program in Burleigh, Morton, and Cass Counties, and accessing Medicaid reimbursements for targeted case management for work handled through the county social service offices.

N.D. Dept of Human Services
Children & Family Services Division

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